
2017-18 Postcards

Postcards from Abroad

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Hokkaido

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February 5, 2018

Hokkaido



Approach to Sapporo TV tower at night~

Over winter break, I was lucky to experience Japan's northern-most island, Hokkaido. This was a part of the country I had dreamt about visiting since middle school, as it is known for a slower life-pace compared to the rest of the country, longer, snowy winters, and beautiful, mild summers. Snow can be found across all parts of the island during the winter. Visitors often also rave about the freshness of foods in this part of Japan as well.

My visit included travel with one German student, a fellow Linfield student and two Japanese friends from AGU. Collectively, we explored Sapporo (the central business hub of Hokkaido and the most developed), Otaru (a small coastal town known for its glassworks and fishing), and Hakodate (a smaller coastal town located at the bottom edge of Hokkaido). Our journey began with a 2.5 hour train ride on local trains from Sagamihara, and a domestic flight from Narita airport. Security is very relaxed for domestic flights, and an entirely different experience compared to longer international excursions. For lodging, we were able to utilize AirBNB rentals, which were inexpensive and (in some cases) conveniently located. Unfortunately, a downside of staying in low-cost rentals is that some of the places do not have heating, or have very rudimentary heating. In Hakodate, we woke up many mornings being able to see our breath in the cold — it was only 3 degrees celsius inside the room. Thankfully, our time was predominantly spent outside exploring, and we needed our rooms only for sleep. This was achieved with the help of large futons and boiled tea as needed.

In the wintertime, Hokkaido is well-known for its snow and ice festivals in early February, when folks from across Japan travel to carve snow and ice into massive shapes and structures. As I had noted previously, the life pace did indeed seem slower, and Hokkaido seemed to be a bit further behind the Tokyo area in terms of influence from other countries. Of course, I did not see a wide variety of cities on the island, but some elements of Hokkaido seem a bit more traditional. For example, the trains in this region were smaller and older, and etiquette was very different compared to trains in the Tokyo area. People seemed a bit more

talkative on trains, and they were generally less open to foreigners. Our group was regularly turned down in restaurants.

If you are in Japan, I would strongly suggest taking the quick flight to Hokkaido. It is a very different but wonderful experience, especially in the wintertime when snow is abundant.

Andrew